

Thank you members of the committee

As a 3rd generation tackle shop owner and guide I have seen our fishery decline from what it was just 30 years ago. I will quote my late grandfather Charlie Medlin in 1992 "It ain't what it used to be". I have pictures from the 70's that show 100 speckled trout days out of the surf which was not uncommon. These were big trout too. Creel limits were not in place like they are today and we made changes to address that over fishing. Other states that have pollution issues much worse than NC have seen their fish stocks return to the point of days long gone in NC. Places like Charleston harbor, Tampa Bay and Miami bay. These places are fishing paradises and they have water quality issues much worse than our own. We as recreational fishermen have bent and bent and bent with creel reductions.

Some may stand up here and say "the bill is just so rich guys with flats boats can catch more fish". They are missing the fact that my children my family and me have been fed from rec fishing dollars for 50 years but, with the state of our fishery and the health of other states fisheries we are in danger. Ask the OBX if rec fishing dollars feed families. Ask every business on my island if rec fishing feeds families. Ask the restaurateur, the gas station, the boat builders, the tackle manufactures and distributors. Ask my 10 employees and the families of the 15 charter captains that run charters for topsail charter fishing if rec dollars feeds families and puts shoes on children's feet. Ask the real estate agents and construction workers who build or sell houses on my island. Anglers are leaving our state to catch our state fish. Shouldn't the red drum be treated at least as well as the Largemouth Bass. The anglers are not coming like they used to. They are going to SC, Fla and LA all of which have healthier fish stocks. I have 1 customer that goes to LA to catch redfish 4 times a year. I know many others that go other places to fish and their dollars leave with them. Our fishery could be great again and it will be when HB 353 passes. I ask you to review the information that these 3 fish make up less than 2% of the commercial sector but 80% of my customers target 2 of these fish exclusively. There is compensation for the very few that participate in this fishery but none for our tourism industry that is in decline due to the state of our fisheries.

Gamefish status is not new to NC. Red Drum and striped bass are already gamefish 3 miles off the beach and in inland waters. Speckled trout are already gamefish in inland waters along with LM Bass, Bream, Crappie and many others. Nc has some of the best FW fishing in the country because it is managed for the most economic gain and JOBS.

There is a restaurant in Louisiana called the redfish grill, they serve red drum as their main dish. ~~The vast majority of their red drum come from NC.~~ In Louisiana the red drum is a gamefish. Just out the back door of the restaurant is some of the best red drum fishing on the planet. So we as North Carolinians have to suffer with a less than stellar fishery to subsidize a great fishery elsewhere. My customers are going to louisiana and spending their hard earned dollars when they could be spending them here. Many of the speckled trout fishermen are now going to Florida and South Carolina when we could have a better fishery than they could

Restauran ?
NO
Specks, Redfish / Striped

We just learned that a national IFA red drum tournament is not coming back this year to my hometown of surf city. 3 of the fishermen said they ^{can catch more elsewhere} ~~just cannot deal with the nets when they can go elsewhere~~ and be assured the school they found pre fishing the previous day will be there the next day. I sold tons of tackle to these guys and my mom rented cottages to many of them. The restaurants did better that week and many of the other businesses saw an increase that week of the tournament. That business is now gone and will not be back unless we do something about our red drum population.

So please help us keep our businesses strong and provide tax dollars to the state. We need gamefish status to make sure we have a healthy fishery for years to come. We need jobs and gamefish status for speckled trout, Red Drum and Stripers will provide those jobs just like they did in other states.

my collar is Blue